

BATTLE CREEK, MICH.

ENQUIRER & NEWS

SEP 15 1972

E - 40,908

S - 44,235

The Enquirer's view

Vietnam bombing — a self-defeating tactic

The nation's two principal intelligence agencies have concluded in recent reports to the White House that Hanoi can sustain the fighting in South Vietnam "at the present rate" for the next two years, despite sustained American bombardment of North Vietnam.

In separate reports prepared late last month, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency declared that although the heavy bombing has been successful in hitting designated targets, it has failed to slow the flow of men and supplies to South Vietnam.

This information is disturbing in and of itself. But it takes on additional meaning when considered in the light of information released this week by the Defense Department that the bombing campaign has resulted in a major increase in the number of American prisoners held by the North Vietnamese.

With the loss of an Air Force F4 Phantom and its two crewmen early this week, the U.S. Command listed a total of 100 American airmen missing in the North since the resumption of full-scale bombing more than five months ago — an average of more than four men a week. At least 37 of these men were taken prisoner, bringing the total of Americans being held in prisoner of war camps in North Vietnam to 425.

Taken together, the intelligence reports and Defense De-

partment statistics call into serious question once again the wisdom of the U.S. policy of bombing North Vietnam. The twin purposes of that policy are supposedly to compel a Vietnam settlement and to free the prisoners of war.

But the intelligence reports make clear that the bombing has no chance of accomplishing the first of its goals for at least two years. And the statistics on American losses indicate that rather than helping to secure the release of American prisoners, the bombing has resulted only in many more prisoners being taken.

A strong argument can be made against the bombing on moral grounds alone. We do not accept the thesis that American attacks have intentionally been directed against civilian targets in North Vietnam. But it is undeniable that the U.S. bombing and mining have taken a terrible toll in innocent civilian dead and food supplies cut off.

This alone would be reason enough to end the bombing. But the antibombing argument takes on practical as well as moral force, when one considers the intelligence estimates and casualty statistics revealed this week. Rather than furthering the cause of peace and facilitating the release of American prisoners, the policy of sustained bombardment of North Vietnam is serving primarily to frustrate those ends.

SLANTED NEWS? STATINTL

*That many people think the Times is biased,
there can be no doubt. The authors offer
facts and figures to suggest that things on 43rd Street
aren't as bad as they seem*

Is It True What They Say about the New York Times?

JOHN C. OTTINGER & PATRICK D. MAINES

TIM KNIGHT: *Are you the managing editor of the greatest newspaper in the world?*

A. M. ROSENTHAL: *Without a doubt. Behind the Lines, WNET, New York, Feb. 21, 1972*

CONSERVATIVES have long dismissed the *New York Times* as a hopeless hotbed of liberalism, biased beyond redemption and therefore not to be taken too seriously. The Vice President, of course, has classified it as only slightly less left-leaning than the television networks. Late in 1969, he charged it with blatant news bias because its early edition—the one he reads in Washington—didn't consider "fit to print" an account of a letter endorsing the Nixon Vietnam policy signed by no less than 59 senators and three hundred representatives. (The *Times* did cover the story in its Late City Edition, as it later informed the Vice President. But the impression was there, and he had relayed it to the country.)

Other conservative leaders have been equally vocal. In *The Conscience of a Majority* Barry Goldwater accused the *Times* of publishing a "100 per cent false" story during the 1964 campaign, springing from a famed but discredited CBS telecast imputing connections between Goldwater and neo-Nazi groups in Germany. In a speech early this year, L. Patrick Gray III, now Acting FBI Director, suggested that "subtle bias may have been at work" when the *Times* ran a photo of then Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian, shown conferring with Attorney General John Mitchell, and identified Mardian as



ITT's Washington vice president, William R. Merriam. This "made it appear that the Justice Department and ITT were in cahoots with each other." As recently as May, Kenneth W. Clawson, Deputy Director of Communications for the White House, attacked the *Times* as "a conduit of enemy propaganda to the American people," in connection with the later-contradicted report that the North Vietnamese had swept Haiphong harbor clean of American mines.

NATIONAL REVIEW itself has raised a questioning eyebrow at the *Times*' "objectivity" at least three times in the past two-and-a-half years. In May 1970, *NR* pointed out, the *Times* described Kent State University, pre-shootings, as a relative enclave of tranquility—disregarding enough SDS inspired riots and breakings and enterings in 1969 to fill

167 pages of a House Internal Security Committee report. In October 1971, *NR* reported, a *Times* head showed that "A Survey of Youth Puts Lindsay in Front of Nixon," relegating to the body of the story the figures which put Senators Muskie and Kennedy far ahead of Lindsay. And in February of this year, *NR* caught the *Times* "managing the news" by suppressing a wire from the North Vietnamese government again refusing to negotiate the release of American prisoners until it learned of the CIA's release of the text of what the *Times* had received but not printed. Managing Editor A. M. Rosenthal later explained the omission to *NR*'s satisfaction; but again the impression of *Times* bias had been created—and spread.

To what extent is this negative impression soundly based? If it isn't true that the *Times* leans to the left, why are so many presumably perceptive people certain that it does? It is not in the conservative interest to perpetuate that assumption if it is false, because however freely one may question various aspects of the *Times*' performance, its power is undeniable.

The *Times*, however, wields its power in various ways. In some cultural fields, it approaches near-omnipotence. A blast from the *Times*' theater critic, especially since the end of the *Herald Tribune*, can doom a Broadway play. It was written of Orville Prescott, the weekday book critic until 1965, that he was "the

Mr. Ottinger, long-time advertising executive, has worked for the Memphis Commercial Appeal and the New York Times. Mr. Maines is Assistant Publisher of *NR*.

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SEP 15 1972

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EDITORIAL PAGE — Editorials, Letters, Opinion

The Way Out

The Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency concurred in recent reports to the White House that North Vietnam can continue fighting in South Vietnam at the present rate for two more years.

That information, released by intelligence officers to the New York Times this week, followed hard upon the release of a Rand Corp. study of the effects of United States bombing in North Vietnam between 1965 and 1968.

The Rand study, based on interviews with North Vietnamese prisoners, found that the bombing:

1. Raised morale in North Vietnam.
2. Increased popular support for Hanoi's Communist government.
3. Increased hatred for the U.S.

The two intelligence agencies said there are indications the Communists will launch major new offensives in South Vietnam within 30 days.

It is normal during debate on any issue to seize upon any data from any source and hurl it into the argument. The above information is damaging to the position of those who support President Nixon's conduct of the war.

But caution about using it springs from the fact that U.S. intelligence has often erred in Vietnam. It failed to discover the 1968 Tet offensive. It failed to detect the timing and extent of the Communist offensive launched this year. Faulty intelligence evidently has underpinned many an optimistic utterance which actual events later shattered. Using intelligence data to support any argument is a risky business.

IF the two intelligence agencies are accurately informed the outlook is discouraging. Earlier intelligence estimates said, when the Communists launched their offensive this spring, that there were enough supplies on hand to sustain it for two months. After that

the American bombing and harbor mining would dry up supplies.

Now two months plus two months have gone by, and Hanoi not only continues to pressure at many points, but is capable of renewing heavy attacks. The blockade of North Vietnam's harbors has stopped oil from the sea, but it's getting in through three four-inch pipelines. Bridges and railroads are cut, but the material of war is moved south anyway.

How long can this go on? Hanoi's leaders, who have been waging war off and on for a quarter of a century, appear willing to continue indefinitely.

How willing are the American people to continue on and on? We cannot send our troops back. All we can do is escalate the bombing even further, attacking Hanoi and Haiphong directly and bombing the 25-mile no-bombing buffer zone south of the Chinese border.

That would hurt North Vietnam, but it could conduct governmental operations away from Hanoi, Haiphong is of little use now as a port city because of the mining, and bombing the buffer zone would simply force its storage and staging functions across the border into China — an inconvenience but not a fatal blow to the Communists.

And if the Rand study is correct, escalated bombing would probably harden the Communists' determination to fight on. So on and on it will go.

To say that our Vietnam involvement is a morass is an old cliché. Like some clichés, it has the ring of truth. The only way out is to get out. Just stop doing what we're doing and get out.